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St. Helena, ghost town of
the Genesee, 1797-1954

ST. HELENA

Ghost Town of the Genesee

1797 - 1954

WRITTEN FOR

The Castile Historical Society

BY

Mildred Lee Anderson

Marian Piper Willey

CASTILE, NEW YORK - 1954

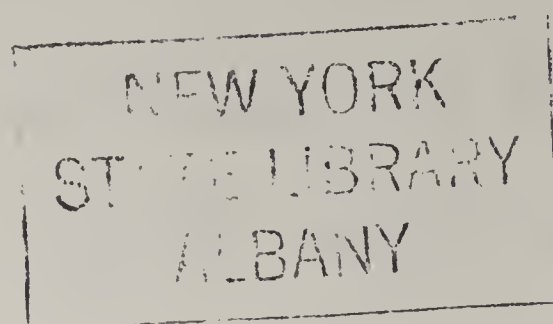
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St. Helena—Ghost Town of the Genesee

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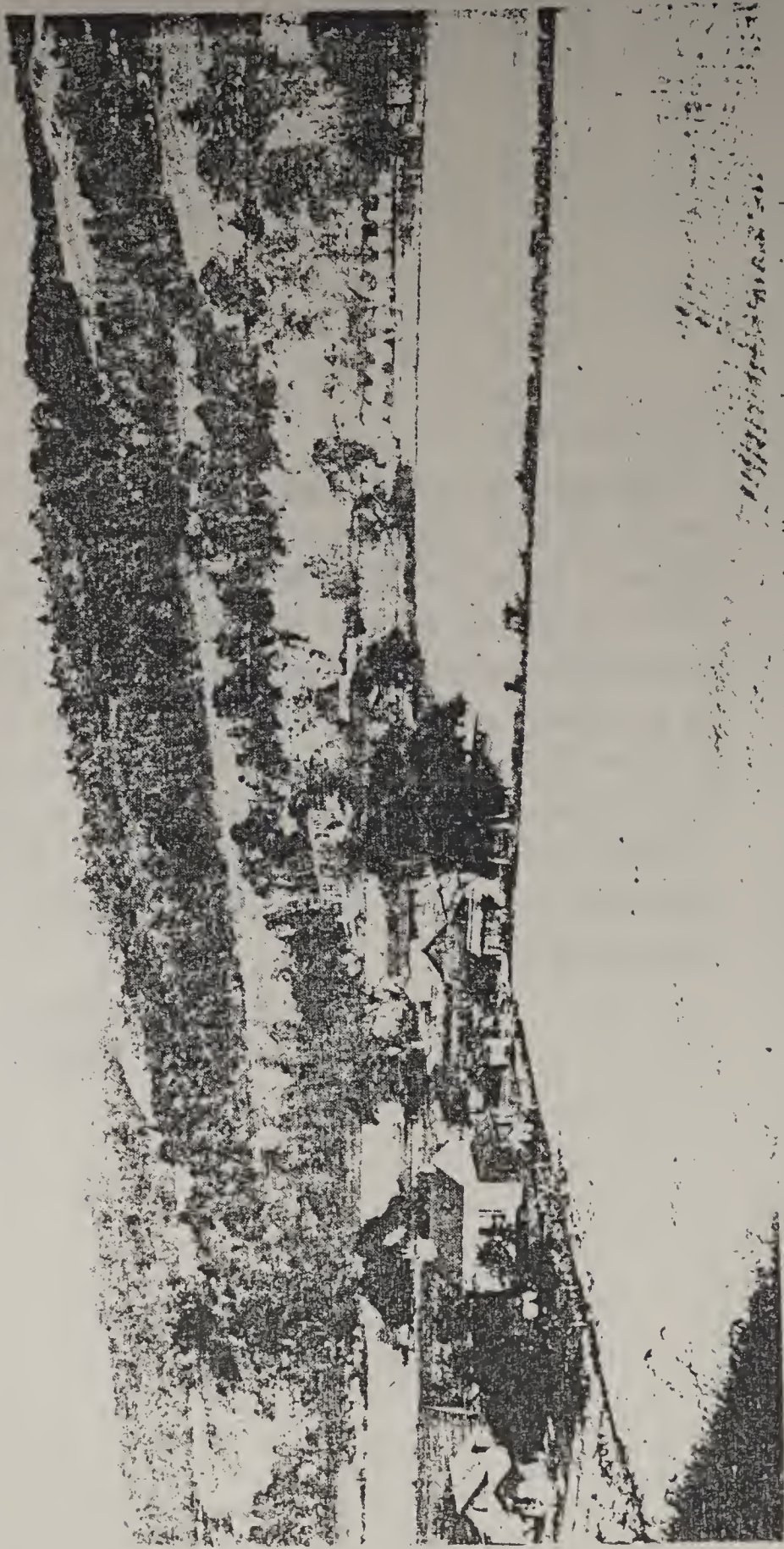


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DEAR READER:

We present to you the following information concerning the little village of St. Helena. It has been very difficult to amass even this much of the history because reliable records are scarce or nonexistent. Many people of the local area have been extremely helpful in loaning scrapbooks and other material which have yielded facts and dates. Old maps have been used as a source of proving ownership of property. We have used these to compile for you a record of this pioneer town, and to the pioneers and the descendants thereof we dedicate our work.

MILDRED LEE ANDERSON
MARIAN PIPER WILLEY



Bird's-eye view of St. Helena as it looked about 1900. The white schoolhouse stands out prominently.

St. Helena

GHOST TOWN OF THE GENESEE

FROM wilderness to civilization—and then desolation. Such is the story of St. Helena. In the years following the Revolutionary War, this area was given to Mary Jemison, “The White Woman of the Genesee,” by the Indians at the council held at Big Tree, near Geneseo, N.Y., in 1797. The gift was made after Mary refused a chance to return to her own people, preferring to stay with her Indian children and family, which pleased the Indians very much. In her life story she stated that when she first saw her land on the Genesee River flats, about three hundred acres of it were open flats, which were supposed to have been cleared by a race of inhabitants who preceded the first Indian settlement in this part of the country. She said the Indians were confident that many parts of the country were settled and for many years occupied by people of whom their fathers had no tradition, as they never had seen them. Whence those people originated, and whither they went, she had never heard one of the oldest and wisest Indians pretend to guess.

The gift of land to Mary Jemison was known as the “Gardeau Reservation,” being six miles wide from east to west, and nearly four and three-fourths miles long from north to south, containing 17,927 acres of land. The Genesee River ran centrally through it. The land was fertile but Mary said it had lain idle so long that a heavy growth of weeds of all kinds covered the ground and it needed more labor than she and her daughters were able to give, so for many years she leased the land to white men to till on shares.

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In 1816, Micah Brooks, Esq., of Bloomfield, Ontario County, and Jellis Clute, Esq., of Leicester, began negotiations for the purchase of a part of her land. Many obstacles presented themselves, among them the fact Mary was not a citizen of the United States, not legally able to convey lands without a special act of the legislature. (Mary Jemison was born to Thomas and Jane Erwin Jemison on board the ship "Mary William," bound for Philadelphia from Ireland, in the year 1742 or 1743.) Thus the assent of the chiefs of the Seneca nation had to be obtained and a commissioner appointed by the President of the United States. At last the arrangements were made and on September 3 or 4, 1823, a deed was given to Micah Brooks, Jellis Clute, and Henry B. Gibson, for all her lands except the Gardeau Tract, a plot of two square miles, which she reserved for herself and her family. This purchase released the land on which St. Helena was built. An old map of 1807, however, has the names of A. Parshall, Wm. Morse, and O. Spellman upon it. It is believed these were the names of shareholders. One portion had the sum of \$58.50 marked on it which is believed to be the amount paid for it.

The first white man to settle in the Genesee Valley, in what is now Livingston County, was Ebenezer Allen, in 1782 at Mt. Morris. He was born in New Jersey. His wife was a Seneca squaw. He was better known as "Indian Allen," and later built a sawmill at St. Helena. Mary Jemison in her life story said, "Allen commenced working my flats that spring (about 1782), and continued to labor there until after the peace, in 1783."

Robert Whaley, of Castile, was known to have a sawmill on Wolf Creek as early as 1808, and in 1812 John and Jesse Jemison, and George Shongo, sons and son-in-law of Mary Jemison, worked for him. At this time there were only small clearings along the river, with here and there an isolated "squatter" who had to move on when the lands were sold.

In 1823, after the sale of the land was final, Henry B. Gibson, who came from Canandaigua, N.Y., settled on the farm now known as "Taborlea" on the Middle Reservation Road. He managed the land in the south portion of the Gardeau Reservation, Jellis Clute the north portion, and Micah Brooks the land east of the river.

EARLY SETTLERS

In 1826, Mr. and Mrs. Parker Nichols emigrated from Vermont and settled in St. Helena, where on September 25, 1827, a daughter, Fanny, was born to them. She could remember seeing Mary Jemison at St. Helena.

An abundance of timber and water power for their mills drew the early settlers to the valley. During the early 1800's, an English surveyor, Stewart by name, laid out the plan for the village. Divided into three sections, residential, business, and manufacturing, the little town began to grow. In 1832, Asa Willey Gifford purchased land there. Asa was born in Vermont in 1798, son of Gideon and Betsy Willey Gifford, and for many years owned land in the valley.

In 1836, the Torrey family occupied the "Granny" Barnes house on the west hillside, just above the valley. One evening at dusk, their sixteen-year-old daughter, Laura, was sent to St. Helena on an errand. On her way, she met a tall, savage-looking Indian. He greeted her with the usual "How!" but her reply was not audible, because she was frightened almost to death. However, she recovered and lived to be ninety-three years old.

In 1845, the family of Josiah Stocking came to St. Helena. They settled on the east side of the river. Also, a David Hill built a house there to live in while cutting timber, stayed there one winter and moved away. The Stocking family had four children when they moved to St. Helena and four were born there. Three of the children died, two of them from measles, during a January thaw. The river was so high that the coffins had to be strapped to boards and drawn up over the bank opposite Wolf Creek. Watchers at night feared their home would be swept away. The children, Helen, six years old, and Dennis, three years old, were buried in the little cemetery on the west hill at St. Helena. Later, a daughter Sally, eighteen years old, who was married to Richard Emmett, died and was buried in the same cemetery. Her husband was a famous stonecutter and made the beautiful large monument which was moved to the Castile cemetery from St. Helena in 1952.

The river, so dangerous when high, was the main means of transportation of lumber, much of it being rafted and floated

downstream to markets. Transportation from St. Helena by roadway, east or west, was up a steep hill. Toward Castile the roads followed two directions and the one near Wolf Creek was known as the Creek Road. Toward Nunda was a long steep hill. About 1840 the Genesee Valley Canal was opened for use and passed through Nunda. That made another means of transporting the valley produce to markets.

On October 4, 1844, Mr. J. Russell Slade of Castile, on his first visit to Mt. Morris, made the river trip from St. Helena, and at that time dined with a large company on their way to the great political mass meeting in Rochester in honor of Henry Clay, the Whig candidate for President. Daniel Webster was one of the orators.

In August, 1852, the Erie Railroad, then the Buffalo and New York City Railroad, opened a branch line through Castile, which made another line of transportation.

One of the very earliest settlers, on the east side of the river at St. Helena, was believed to be William Wallace. He served in the War of 1812. He passed through Mt. Morris and settled in the densely timbered area of St. Helena soon after the war. He died in 1872, at the age of ninety-six years. A sword carried during the war is one of the cherished possessions of the heirs of his grandson, Arthur Chase, who lived in Big Bend until his death in 1912.

By 1850, the families of J. D. Tallman, Lafayette Wisner, Charles Foote, Roswell Gould, D. Weed, J. Purdy, E. Kendrick, F. Gleason, A. Eastwood, F. M. Allen, N. K. Barton, and Mrs. "Granny" Barnes were living at St. Helena. These were followed in 1853 by Baltus Van Kleeck, in 1855 by Milton Burnap, Sr., who owned property there in 1852, and in 1855 to 1865 by Jake Decker, Sherman Streeter, John Gifford, James Piper (1861), J. Dixon, H. Dixon, J. Weir, Fred Marsh, Sr. (1857), Mrs. Larkham, H. McDuffie, G. Dixon, E. Crowley, E. L. Edwards, and George Yeckley. Mrs. George Washington Wood and her three children came from North Java in 1858. John Piper settled there in 1867.

A map of 1853 shows a sawmill owned by Eastwood, F. Gleason's sawmill, a sash-and-blind mill owned by Frace & Allen, and a turning mill along the old Mill Race which had been con-

structed to furnish power. These were all along Water Street, close by the river. Water Street, running north, formed the road to Gardeau Flats and Smokey Hollow. Main Street ran east and west and connected with the Wolf Creek Road and West Hill Road. Another street was laid out running south from Main and connecting with Water Street as it followed the Mill Race to the fording place at the south end of the valley. No one seems to know how "Maiden Lane" got its name.

ST. HELENA BRIDGES AND MILLS

The first bridge across the river was a covered structure with wooden latticework sides, built in 1835, and was said to be very picturesque. There were 226 feet of latticework spanning the river with fifty feet of different construction at the approaches. This linked Wyoming and Livingston counties and made it possible for the families on the east side of the river to reach the mills and stores without travelling by boat or fording the river. This bridge was in use until 1868, when it became unsafe and was replaced with a four-span bridge of truss style. This bridge, erected by Benjamin Whittman, of Castile, was in use until 1875. It gave out and was replaced by another truss-style bridge. In 1884, this bridge was swept away by the ice, leaving the public again without a means of transportation over the river.

After nearly two years of paralyzing effort and court interference, the towns of Castile and Mt. Morris decided to build a bridge of iron with durable stone piers, but this also was swept away by the ice in 1904, leaving three 112-foot spans a short distance away where they were of no use. After building the piers four feet higher, the bridge was repaired and replaced and was safe from ice and water.

Mr. Jesse Hurlburt, who was employed for many years by the highway department, said Wyoming and Livingston counties took turns, a year at a time, keeping the bridge in repair.

Amzi Parshall owned a grist and flour mill and lived where Tom Marsh lived later. This mill must have been one of the first, as it was sold in 1853 to Lafayette Wisner and Charles Foote, who rebuilt and enlarged it. In a short time, however, it was sold to Roswell Gould and Baltus Van Kleeck, the latter finally be-

coming sole owner and operating the mill until his death in 1861. Henry Dixon, who had previously worked for Mr. Parshall, operated the mill for a time; also, a Mr. Totten worked there for Mrs. Van Kleeck, who carried on the business after her husband's death. As years went by, the mill was doing less and less, and in 1865 it was bought by Joseph R. Wier of New Jersey. A spring freshet that year took out the dam and the mill was run only as the water in the river was at just the right level. Milling interests dwindled and in June, 1867, the mill burned down, very mysteriously, putting an end to most of the business enterprises in St. Helena. That same year the post office in the valley was discontinued.

At one time, there was also a sash-and-blind factory along the Mill Race, where some work of repairing furniture was done. It was run by Walter Smith and a young man named Sherwood, who were drowned in the river about the year 1852. It was then operated by Morgan Allen and William Frace until sold to John Merithew. It was finally merged into a shingle mill operated by John Merithew, who was killed while at work. The building was removed and converted into a cider mill by Milton Burnap, Sr.

William Frace made wagons as well as sash and blinds. He was married in 1836 and died in the early 1900's, when over ninety years of age. At that time, he lived in Belfast and was the oldest member of the Odd Fellows Lodge in New York State. Mrs. Emma Wyant, of Castile, who knew Mr. Frace in his later years, has given these facts concerning him.

Near the sawmill was a shop where picket fences were made. The upper sawmill was owned for some years by P. L. Merithew, but was owned by Milton Burnap, Sr., at the time of his death in 1868.

About 1852, a store was kept in the red house at Main and Water streets by Mr. Eldridge, and afterwards by Morris Allen. The building was later owned by Baltus Van Kleeck. It had a sign, painted in large back letters on a white base, that was visible from both sides of the store. Many years ago, the story was told of a lady who rode through the valley on a cold, stormy day in winter and tried to read the sign "St. Helena Store," but through her veil and the snow, decided she had reached "Hell's End," and so bade her driver take her away.

ST. HELENA—GHOST TOWN OF THE GENESSEE

From the *Nunda News* of November 12, 1920, comes this reprint, written by a Castile correspondent for the *Perry Record*:

"WHEN ST. HELENA WAS A VILLAGE—Election times were different 60 years ago from the campaign just closed. On the evening of October 29, 1860, a Republican Mass Meeting was held at St. Helena, the hamlet two miles east of this village on the Genesee River. There was no building large enough to accommodate the people, and the speakers spoke from the steps of the schoolhouse. They were Walter S. Coffin, Lawyer Gardner, Dr. B. T. Kneeland, and Charles Randall, all of Nunda. Nearly 100 Wide-awakes from Castile with a band, marched through the streets. The company wore red and blue oilcloth caps and capes and carried kerosene oil torches. Large piles of pine stumps were set on fire on the hillsides, which lighted the valley like day. Lyman C. Felch of Liberty Street, Castile, was a member of the company and a first voter. The issue of the day was 'Non-Extension of Slavery into the New Territory,' which elected Abraham Lincoln.

"After the speeches the company and all present marched down the river half a mile to the home of Milton Burnap, Sr., who served refreshments, consisting of crackers, cheese, cider and apples. The cannon used at that time was afterward stolen, and years later was found in the bottom of the old well in the rear of the present town and village clerk's office in Castile.

"St. Helena at that time was one of the prosperous hamlets along the river, with a flour mill, two sawmills, shingle mill, paper mill, and two general stores, a hotel and 25 dwellings, with a school having 75 pupils during the winter term. Now there are only half a dozen families living on the flats." (1920)

HOMES AND PLACES OF BUSINESS

West of the store building was the home of Henry Dixon, head miller for Mr. Parshall for many years. Next, west of Mr. Dixon's one-half acre lot, was a cross street running south from Main Street past the farm home of Mr. Parshall. This was the street called "Maiden Lane." On this street at one time were six or seven houses,

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At the west corner of Maiden Lane and Main Street, J. D. Tallman owned and conducted a hotel business for accommodation of both man and beast. This property was later owned by Mr. Foote. South of the hotel, N. K. Barton had a blacksmith shop. Mr. Barton moved to Castile in 1888, after about thirty years' residence in St. Helena. The Barton lot and the hotel lot were later owned by Mr. Orsburn, and George Hovey lived in the hotel building.

Farther to the west was the place where P. L. Merithew lived. It was sold to John Gifford in 1863, and here Mr. Gifford died on Christmas day, 1866. This place was later owned by G. E. Piper. Next was the farm home of Perses P. Preston, who sold to Mr. Wisner about the time he purchased the mill property in 1852 or 1853. This property changed ownership many times but was the home of Asa Gifford who died in 1885. Later it was owned and occupied by John Streeter, son of Sherman Streeter. Next was the new schoolhouse, completed in 1856, a large building where many happy children attended school. Milton Burnap, in his memoirs, said he attended school for six or seven winters there and had known as many as seventy pupils on the rolls.

West of the schoolhouse was the house where William Morse once lived. Mr. Morse died in 1851. The earliest date found on a marker, when the cemetery was removed in 1952, was that of an infant son of Wm. and E. Morse, July 8, 1841. John Piper purchased this property in 1867 and it was occupied by members of the family until 1938, when his younger brother, Herman, left the valley.

Along the west side of the valley, downstream from the bridge, the floods of the Genesee caused much damage. The farm owned by Milton Burnap, Sr., was badly ravaged by floods. The house was moved about twenty rods to the west, the orchard was swept away as well as about one third of the best land. E. E. Johnson, Frank Lucas, and George Teeple owned the farm at different times.

The land along the east side of the river, which lay in Livingston County, was also considered a part of St. Helena, and here the family of John Orsburn located about 1882 or earlier. It is thought the family of Gideon Phelps (father of Norman and Phyletus Phelps of Castile) located here also about 1880.

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Among the prominent families who lived at St. Helena in the early days were Mr. and Mrs. Edward E. Johnson and their three daughters, Belle, Eva E., and Stella. All of the girls were born at St. Helena and Stella died there in infancy. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson came to St. Helena from Chenango County in the spring of 1871. Mrs. Johnson's father, Enos Alcott, of that place, had visited his sister, Mrs. Asa Gifford, at St. Helena a short time before and had been so impressed by the early spring seasons and verdant green of the valley that he sold the Johnsons the idea of buying a farm there from Fred Marsh, Sr., sight unseen.

In true pioneer style, the Johnsons' earthly possessions were shipped by the Erie Canal to Rochester, thence they were transferred to the Genesee Valley Canal and taken to Messenger's Hollow (now Oakland, near Nunda) and then drawn by horses and wagon to the new farm home in St. Helena.

Mrs. Johnson and her father came by train to Castile on the Buffalo and New York City Branch of the Erie Railroad which had been in operation since August 25, 1852. Mr. Johnson and his brother-in-law drove from Chenango with their team of horses, the trip taking three days. Mr. Johnson confessed later that he was a bit homesick for his former home on pretty Chenango Lake when he first looked into the Genesee River Valley from the steep eastern hill, but he grew fond of his little farm and spent many happy years on it. Mr. Johnson also became a "keeper of bees." Many new orchards were growing in the valley and the blossoms of the fruit trees, together with the sweet clover and buckwheat blooms, proved abundant feeding for the bees. One year the Johnsons harvested four tons of honey.

Miss Eva Johnson, who lives in Castile, recalled recently how she and her sister enjoyed the visits of their favorite travelling peddler, Morris Rosenbloom. He came several times a year to the village and usually spent the night with friends. He carried a huge assortment of household wares wrapped in a tent-shaped piece of cloth, which he folded and carried on his back as he journeyed about the countryside. In later years, Mr. Rosenbloom used a horse and cart to convey his "store" about, and became a prosperous man.

About thirty years ago, Miss Johnson met Mr. Rosenbloom in Rochester, where he had become the city's largest diamond im-

porter. He recalled the many trips he had made to the valley and the kindness shown him by the Johnson family.

Among the first friends of the Johnson family at St. Helena were Mr. and Mrs. John W. Piper, who came to St. Helena in 1867. Always fast friends, the Pipers followed the Johnsons, who moved to Castile in 1889, and lived in the south half of the Johnson house on North Main Street in 1896.

CASTILIAN NOTES

March 28, 1879: "Mr. Gaines, the publisher, apologizes for the lateness of this week's paper, as he had attended a law suit at Portage, which lasted all the previous day and into the early morning hours. The case concerned a charge against George Green, of St. Helena, for failing to pay the required tax on his dog. After those present had listened to the two lawyers expound their knowledge all that time, the jury brought in a verdict of 'no cause for action.' " St. Helena was "on the map" that day.

September 10, 1880: "St. Helena had a 'Garfield and Arthur' pole raising from which floated banners bearing the names of those two candidates. Lawyer Olney of Nunda was the speaker. A fine crowd attended and a supper was held at 'Squire' Burnap's, in front of whose home the pole was raised."

April 4, 1882: "Master Willie Eddy, who lives near the Genesee, caught a five pound mullet in the river."

April 21, 1882: "Castile people are excited over some excellent specimens of anthracite coal found near St. Helena. Efforts are being made to organize a stock company. Last summer, a stick was inserted four feet into a spongy piece of ground and when it was withdrawn and lighted with a match, a gas was ignited, which burned with a blue flame for some minutes. Therefore, it would seem that oil or gas would be found if a well were drilled in the vicinity of St. Helena." (Apparently nothing ever developed.)

The following episode was recalled by John E. Eddy, of Castile, who was born on the farm of his father, Franklin Eddy, on Wolf Creek Road near St. Helena.

AN EPISODE OF 1881

Mr. John Chase, a highly respected farmer, who lived across the river opposite St. Helena, had cut and sold two thousand railroad ties, which were to be used in building a part of the Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad, near Mt. Morris, at which place the ties were to be delivered. Mr. Chase believed the quickest and cheapest way to transport the order was by water. He built a mammoth raft, on which he loaded one half of the ties, and waited for a spring freshet to furnish water enough to float the load downstream.

One bright morning everything seemed in readiness and the raft and its load were headed into the river below the former dam site. "Hi" Merithew and George Green were standing on the front end of the raft, steering with huge oars, and Mr. Chase was steering in the same way from the rear part of the load. The river was higher and the water swifter than the men realized, and immediately the raft and its occupants were in trouble. As the raft hit the swift current below the dam site, they were unable to steer the heavy load. The force of the water carried them into the high banks on the eastern side of the river, broke the raft in half, and threw Mr. Chase into the raging torrent. He clung to his oar and to the rocks until he was rescued by his eldest son, Arthur, who helped him into a rowboat. Arthur had been well taught in handling a rowboat on the waters of the Genesee and to that fact, no doubt, John Chase owed his life that day.

Many spectators had gathered to watch the launching. Mr. Eddy, then a boy of eight, was standing on the bridge. He recalled that the other two men and the remaining part of the raft were carried rapidly downstream. As they were swept under the bridge, Mr. Green yelled, "Mt. Morris, here we come!" After hurriedly changing to dry clothes, Mr. Chase set out in his rowboat to try to catch the runaway raft and its unwilling occupants. A short distance downstream, Mr. Green had jumped to some dry land, only to find it was an island being rapidly covered by the rising water. He was knee deep in water when Mr. Chase arrived. The two men overtook Mr. Merithew, still on the split raft, just as he was about to be swept over the dam at

Mt. Morris. Mr. Chase hired a farmer to bring all three back to St. Helena. The remaining half of the ties were floated downstream and some of them reached their destination.

THE ORSBURN FAMILY

In 1882, John A. Orsburn and Mary Lottie Alger of Greigsville were married and began housekeeping on the farm in St. Helena which was their home until Mrs. Orsburn's death January 3, 1916. John died there July 9, 1925. Their farm was the fertile flat land on the east side of the river farthest to the north. To them were born eight children, all boys. Two of the children died in 1894 of mumps and whooping cough and were buried in the St. Helena cemetery. As far as can be learned, these burials were the last made in that spot. Three of the boys are still living at this time.

John's father, C. Chauncey Orsburn, died at the home of his son, January 10, 1904, and his widow died there October 2nd of the same year. Prior to this time the following item was printed and clipped from a newspaper (name not known):

"AN OLD VIOLIN—There is in possession of Chauncey Orsburn, who lives in St. Helena, town of Castile, and his brother John Orsburn, a violin and case which are attracting a great deal of attention. On the interior of the violin is a slip of paper pasted in, yellow with age, and on it is the following inscription: 'Made by Guyford Dufflo Bononicufis, Italy, January 12, 1527.'"

"For about 140 years this violin has been in the Orsburn family. The family are a long-lived one, the father having lived to be 102 years of age, and was stung to death in 1864 by bees. Out of his family of six sons and seven daughters, there are two sons and two daughters still surviving, and none of the departed ones died under 70 years, one son dying at the age of 90 years. The daughters now living are over 80 years, while the two sons, Chauncey and John, who own the ancient musical instrument, are aged 85 and 89 respectively. The violin mentioned has been handed down from generation to generation, and is still a sweet-

The name as given in the clipping is apparently not accurate, being a combination of English and Italian. But when the violin was examined during the preparation of this book, the inscription was so dim that the name could not be fully deciphered, even with a reading glass.

toned instrument. The box which contains this musical instrument was made by John Orsburn while a resident of Michigan, and contains 2,200 different pieces and kinds of wood, polished down and finished in its natural colors. Fifteen pieces were put in every day he worked on it, and in so doing he kept exact account of the number. It took a year and a trifle over to make the case. Over 100 of the pieces contained in the case have an interesting history in relation to the war, and last week these two brothers who are veterans, attended a meeting of the Craig Wadsworth Post, No. 417, G.A.R., at Nunda and told exciting incidents of how a number of the pieces were procured. They both played familiar war tunes on the violin and played them well. The brothers have refused \$400 for the case and violin, preferring to keep them in the family. . . ."

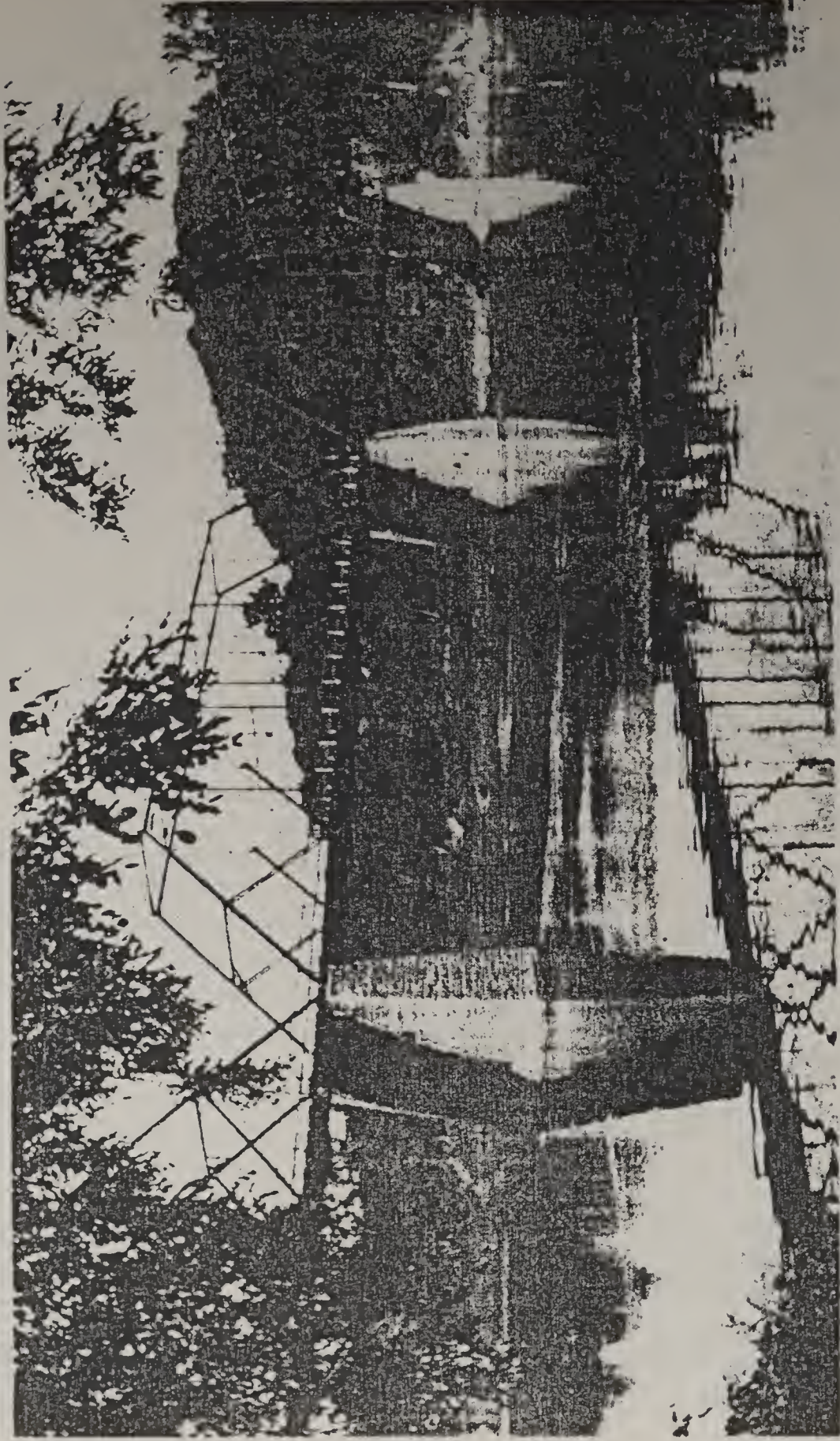
The violin, at this writing, is 427 years old and has been in this same family for 198 years. Before his death, Mr. Orsburn gave the cherished instrument to his grandson, Harry, who was musically inclined, as were all the family. It is now the prized possession of Harry's widow, Ednah Case Orsburn, who lives at Oakland.

BRIDGE DIFFICULTIES

February 22, 1884, the river bridge succumbed to the ice and high water. Up until that time the structure had been of wood but now the public wanted a bridge of more substantial structure and proposed iron for the work. By July, 1884, it was agreed that a bridge should be built and the cost shared equally by Wyoming and Livingston counties, since the river was the boundary line between the two.

The *Castilian* of September 14, 1884, states that "The supervisors and highway commissioners of Mt. Morris and Castile met at Perry to discuss building a new bridge at St. Helena. The Livingston County officials seemed to think that 'crossing in the mud and water was good enough for travellers' and refused to agree to any reasonable ideas in the matter. Castile's official suggestions were enterprising, judicious and wise."

For nearly two years the subject was argued. During April, 1885, the bridge matter was tried in Geneseo before Hon. J. H. Stevens of Livingston County. The bridge was finally built



The St. Helena Bridge. This picture was taken by the late Edward B. Poste, of Perry, about 1920. It shows the final bridge at this location, built of iron, with high stone piers. It was demolished in 1950. (*Photo. property of James Cutler, Castile, N.Y.*)

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and it served until 1904, when it was swept away by ice. It was rebuilt and repaired after the piers had been raised about four feet, leaving more room for ice cakes to pass under it.

The *Nunda News* of August 1, 1885, printed this item:

"FUN AT ST. HELENA—Now that an iron bridge is to be built over the Genesee River at St. Helena, it is proposed to have a little fun when it is completed, judging from the following which has been sent in for publication:

"A grand banquet is announced to be given by the ladies of St. Helena, on the completion of the iron bridge at that place. At the banquet table toasts will be given and responded to as follows:

Frederick Marsh, Toastmaster

"Our Beautiful Hills, " Response by Mr. Fred M. Mills,
of Mt. Morris

"Our Public Roads and Bridges," Response by Mr. Nicholas
Alpaugh, of Castile

"Cubic Measure," Response by Mr. Reuben J. Smith,
Civil Engineer, Rochester

"Transportation," Response by O. F. Tabor, Esq., of Castile

"Hydraulics and Hydrostatics," Response by Mr. Harry B. Gleason,
Architect, Rochester

"Our Finances," Response by Thomas J. Gamble, Esq.,
of Mt. Morris

"Economy," Response by E. C. Olney, Esq., of Nunda

"The Iron King," Response by Mr. Henry G. Claystone,
Cleveland, Ohio

"The Ladies," Response by Walter M. Gledhill, Esq.,
of Castile

The entertainment will conclude with a moonlight promenade on the bridge.

"BY ORDER OF COMMITTEE"

ST. HELENA'S PATRIOTIC LIFE

St. Helena's young men responded quickly when their country called for volunteers during the Civil War, 1861-65. Among them were: Charles Buckley, Eugene Buckley, Milton Burnap, Emerson Crowley, George Crowley, Franklin Eddy, George Green, James Green, Fitch Merithew, Hiram Merithew, Philan-

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der Merithew, Chauncey Orsburn, Albert Piper, George Piper, Henry Piper, John Piper, Myron Powell, Hugh Skillin, Sherman Streeter, George Westbrook and Emmett Wood.

Many of those boys drilled on fields near Portage High Bridge. There were such large numbers of volunteers that the hastily built barracks could not house all of them. It is said that old buildings, used for the overflow, still stand in Portageville.

Today, four historical markers point the way to the "Drill and Parade Grounds," reminders of the part which the area played in the great war tragedy.

All of St. Helena's boys saw fierce fighting and suffered the horror and pain of war. Among the most seriously wounded was John Piper, whose left arm was severed during the Battle of Fredericksburg. In 1863, he was given a Surgeon's Certificate of Discharge and returned to St. Helena. However, he re-enlisted in 1864 for a three-year period and served as clerk for a general on the battlefield until the end of the war, and for the balance of the term in the War Department at Washington, D.C.

Shortly after the close of the war in 1865, its survivors formed the "Grand Army of the Republic" Encampment. Posts were organized, and in 1869 western New York's "Boys in Blue" began to hold annual reunions to commemorate the day that they marched away from the "old campground" at Portage.

Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross and at that time a resident of Dansville, addressed the group on August 26, 1880, at their reunion at Portage. She told them that the names of twenty boys, who had prepared for battle in that very area, appeared in her records as having died in Andersonville Prison. She had visited the graves in the prison cemetery, had had the last resting places of those valiant heroes covered properly, enclosed, marked and suitable burial rites performed for each one.

That information was very comforting to the bereaved families and showed Clara Barton's great compassion.

In 1885, the annual reunion was held at Nunda and was a colorful and enthusiastic gathering. Several of St. Helena's veterans attended; among them was Chauncey Orsburn, the oldest member of Craig W. Wadsworth Post, at Nunda.

Appropriate services to honor Castile's soldier dead were held on Memorial Day in 1890. As the name of each of the fifty de-

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ceased heroes was read, a little girl, dressed in white, stepped forward to present a bouquet of flowers.

The following from St. Helena were thus honored: Charles Buckley, James Green, Albert Piper, George Piper, and Emmett Wood, all of whom died in Andersonville Prison, and Franklin Eddy, who died in 1884 at his home.

Many of the Valley Veterans were charter members of George G. Pierce Post when it was organized at Castile. Mr. Pierce, in whose honor it was named, was wounded during the war and died, in 1874, in the Army Hospital at Washington, D.C.

The group's new rooms over Bush's store (Cummings Pharmacy) were opened in 1891 with Harvey Castle as Commander. The two rooms were newly carpeted and pleasantly furnished. The place of honor was given to an American flag, now tattered and torn, which had been presented to the regiment during the war by the ladies of Castile and Gainesville. Comrade Matthew Harrington, who carried the banner at one time, was at the meeting.

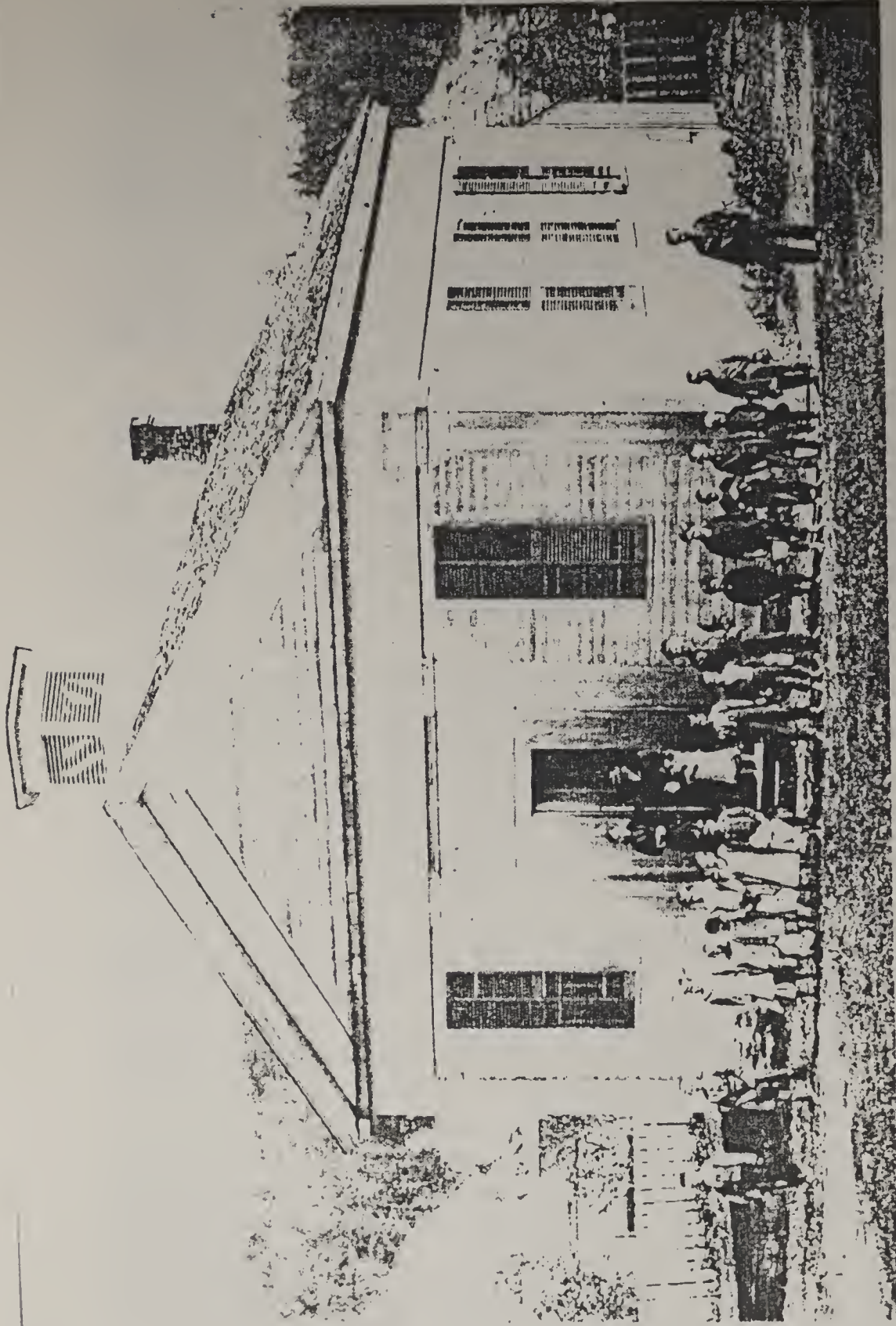
The bountiful refreshments, consisting of baked beans, biscuits, coffee and cake, were enjoyed by one hundred people.

In 1892, a "Sons of Veterans" Camp was organized at Castile. It was named in honor of Dr. D. W. Harrington of Buffalo, a former resident and Civil War veteran. He was unable to attend the first meeting, but sent a letter of appreciation and included a gift of fifty dollars, which he called the well-known "hardtack" of Army days.

Among the officers elected by the Camp in 1894 were: First Sergeant, John E. Eddy; Corporal of the Guard, Roger N. Piper; and Camp Guard, John A. Streeter.

When the annual G.A.R. Encampment was held in 1897, two hundred and sixty veterans were guests of Dr. Harrington at the old Methodist Church in Buffalo.

The men were quartered in true Army style, sleeping on cots and hearing "taps" sounded every fifteen minutes all night. If a guest showed inclination to sleep, he was quickly surrounded by comrades who told him "what happened at Shenandoah" and similar war stories. The Buffalo meeting was the jolliest "Camp" that the men ever attended. Several St. Helena ex-soldiers enjoyed happy reunions with their 1861-65 buddies.



The St. Helena School in 1880, when Miss Ella Chilson was teacher.

Left to right, first row: David Crowley, James Green, Belle Burnap, Etta Burnap, Ethel Wood, Lillian Piper, Belle Johnson. *Jennie Phelps, Scott Phelps, Roy Green, Laban Burnap, John Eddy, Will Eddy, Chauncey Merithew, Ernest Green, Roger Piper, John Streeter, George Piper. Second row:* Frances Streeter, Miss Chilson, Eva Johnson.

ST. HELENA'S SCHOOL LIFE

When homes began to be established in St. Helena, the need for a school arose, naturally. The exact date of the building of the first schoolhouse cannot be learned. However, it is known that the structure was located in the valley on the west side of the northern highway leading toward Castile. The building was used later for a barn.

The school district was Number Four, at first, but later was changed to Number Ten in Castile Township.

Since the village's plans were made about 1820, it would appear that the schoolhouse was included. The first school building was used until the summer of 1856, when a large, commodious structure, located on the south side of Main Street, was completed. Philander L. Merithew, an early settler and a carpenter and joiner, built the new school building, as well as several St. Helena houses. Mr. Merithew died in his valley home in 1873 and his wife, Lydia, passed on in 1890 at the age of eighty-eight years. Both were buried in the little cemetery on the western hillside. They were the maternal grandparents of Mrs. Alice Sheer of Warsaw and Otto Clark of Oakland. When Mrs. Merithew was a young girl, she enjoyed riding her pony to Gardeau Flats. She carried fruit to Mary Jemison and her family, and became a friend of the Indians.

As today, in the olden times there was a spirit of rivalry between school districts to erect the most attractive and complete building, and District Number Four at St. Helena was no exception. The new building was a well-proportioned building with eight full-length windows, each having sturdy wooden blinds. The front entrance was surrounded by carved pillars and ornate trimmings. The four corners of the schoolhouse had the same handsome style of architecture. On the end of the shingled roof facing Main Street was a picturesque belfry, topped by a slender spire, pointing skyward. Inside the belfry hung the sweet-sounding bell.

The outside of the building was painted white at all times and the blinds were green.

The front door led into the entry, beyond which was the main schoolroom. The seats and desks were made of polished grained

wood. Each seat held two pupils. The desks had sunken inkwells on top, and the usual space for books underneath. The teacher's desk, on a platform extending across the south end of the room, was of polished wood, too, and had a sloping top which opened to reveal a large compartment.

There were two school terms of sixteen weeks each, summer and winter, so called. The summer term ran from April through July, and the winter term from September through December. Vacation was held during the coldest months of the year, when illness and deep snow were most apt to prevent the children from attending school. There was no heated bus service in those days!

The scholars were not graded, but were first primer, first reader, and so forth, students. Anyone between the ages of five and twenty-one could attend school and many made use of the opportunity, for one reason or another. Mrs. Belle Merithew Clark Piper attended school at St. Helena, as a little girl, when young people, actually grown men and women, came during the winter term from the farms in the valley and on the hillsides to swell the registration to ninety. There were no seats for the overflow students, so they sat on the benches around the sides of the room and on the edge of the low platform. They kept their books and slates on the floor under the benches.

Those were very rugged days for St. Helena teachers. Often the venture became too difficult after a few weeks' struggle and then a brave new recruit attempted to conquer and instruct the unruly scholars. That procedure was repeated five or six times during some of the winter terms. The situation was not helped by the fact that the teacher was generally younger than the oldest boys and girls.

However, all was not unpleasant for the teachers during their stay in the valley and many good times at parties, dances, and other social affairs were enjoyed. A story is told of the popularity of a certain teacher. One night, a spring freshet threatened to flood the house near the river where the young lady was boarding. Unconcerned with the safety of the other occupants of the dwelling, a local swain rescued the teacher by way of her bedroom window, and carried her the full length of Main Street to the schoolhouse, which was not in danger of being flooded!

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The St. Helena children learned well their lessons and enjoyed playing the ever-popular school games, indoor and outdoor, from "Fruit Basket" to "Fox and Geese."

In the autumn, one favorite recess pastime was to hurry across the field to Milton Burnap's cider mill. There, two by two, the children sat astride a filled barrel and sipped the thick, sweet fluid through grain straws, which they had hastily gathered from the stack as they passed by. Perhaps that little game was the foundation for the jingle,

"The prettiest girl I ever saw
Was sipping cider through a straw."

One summer evening when life seemed a bit dull to a St. Helena schoolmarm, she dressed herself to represent a destitute gypsy woman, attired the two little daughters of the family with whom she was boarding to portray neglected waifs and, with them, visited the valley homes to try to solicit alms "for her poor starving children." All three of the participants performed so well and their disguises were so perfect, that the kindly people gave them food and pennies, much to the chagrin of the little girls' real parents.

By 1895, the average weekly wage of the teachers was \$8.75, and the district received the magnificent sum of \$100 each year from the state.

Trustees were given the "power and responsibility of establishing rules for government and discipline in their respective schools." The Compulsory Education Law went into effect in 1895 and truant officers were advised "to combine firmness with gentleness, discrimination with circumstances."

A person entering the teaching service for the first time could teach one year on a so-called third-grade certificate, which was secured by passing a written examination. The only other requirement was that the applicant must be sixteen years old. If the person desired to remain longer in the service, a second-grade certificate was obtained by passing another examination. The same procedure was followed in securing a first-grade certificate, except that the applicant had three trials in attempting to pass the last test which, naturally, was more difficult. The first-grade certificate was renewable, also.



The St. Helena School in 1893, when Miss Ida Bennett was teacher.

Left to right, first row: Anna Nichols, Otto Clark, Bessie Schaffer, Harry Orsburn, Myra Nichols. Second row: Roy Orsburn, Webb Schaffer, Edward Marsh, Stanley Nichols, Winfield Wood, Ray Orsburn, Roger Marsh, Alice Clark. Third row: Bert Eddy, Jennie Eddy, Ruth Piper, Nora Clark, Mildred Nichols. Fourth row: Dayton Wood, Miss Bennett, Clinton Piper. (Photo, property of Otto Clark, Nunda, N.Y.)

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The following is an incomplete list of those who taught school at St. Helena. It has been impossible to secure records before 1870. While all of the names are not in chronological order, an attempt has been made to be as accurate as possible. The first known teacher was Elizabeth Walker, of Oakland, who taught in St. Helena about 1870. Later, she was the wife of Rev. Bela Poste, a Methodist Protestant minister at Brooks Grove, who served the St. Helena charge. Her grandson, Donald Edward Poste, of Perry and Buffalo, is District Passenger Agent for the Chicago, Duluth and Georgian Bay Transit Company. Next, in 1878, Edgar Rugg, and in 1880, Ella Chilson (Mrs. Everett Piper*). After Miss Chilson came Marietta Barnes (Mrs. John Chase*), Fred Danforth*, Edward Quick, Jennie Howell, Wealthy Burr, Susie Kellogg (Mrs. Earl Kingsley*), Lillian Austin (Mrs. Jacob Democker*), Ella Beardsley (Mrs. George Piper*), Frank Ackerman, Charles Owen, Marguerite Ward Sillman, Eugene H. Ward, Ida Paul Wilner, Lucy Holmes (Mrs. Elkanah Sanford*), Alida Chase (Mrs. Jesse Hurlburt, Castile), Ida Bennett (Mrs. John Holmes*), Gertrude Brainard*, Effie Clute*, Emma Felch*, Bert Thomson*, Simeon Wells, Edgar Sharp, Kathryn Marsh (Mrs. Clarence Holmes*), Mildred Marsh*, Kate Phaylan, Margaret O'Donnell, Claude Potter, Victor Barnum, Mary Duggan, Dora Galentine (Mrs. Edward Galton, Nunda), Alice Parker (Mrs. George Davis, Arcade), Mrs. Bradley, Edith Pfaff (Mrs. Otto Clark, Oakland), Marian Chase (Nunda), Hattie Kellogg*, Clarence Morey, Ruth Phelps (Silver Springs), Anna Faxon (Mrs. Harry Everett, Castile), Amy Robson (Mrs. Ralph Durfee, Silver Springs), and Dorrice Wernley, who apparently was St. Helena's final schoolteacher, in 1919. The last scholars were Arnold Hopkins; Glen, George, and Frances Streeter; and Virginia Teeple.

As far as can be learned, Mrs. Alida Chase Hurlburt is the oldest St. Helena teacher now living. She is eighty-five and she and her husband, Jesse, are spending the sunset years of their lives at the Norton Nursing Home, Castile, where they enjoy reminiscing with friends about the olden days. Mrs. Hurlburt taught at St. Helena from 1890 to 1893, and her weekly wages were \$5.50, from which she paid her board and room expenses,

*Deceased.

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Besides the pupils mentioned elsewhere she remembers Enos Alcott, Amelia and Merris Nichols, Gaylord and Norman Phelps, and Rollie Wood. She recalls how the clear, sweet notes of the school bell echoed across the valley from hillside to hillside as she rang it twice each day to beckon the children to "come and learn."

Mrs. Dora Galentine Galton of Nunda, who taught in the valley in 1901-02, lists Orlo Orsburn, Phyletus and McKinley Phelps as being her scholars in addition to some already mentioned.

Mrs. Alice Parker Davis, of Arcade, who was the 1906-07 teacher, began her work at St. Helena when she was sixteen years old. Although very young, she enjoyed her sojourn in the valley and relates many interesting and amusing incidents of that time. She enjoyed, especially, the beautiful woodlands, the peaceful river and the pretty bridge on which she would stand and imagine she was sailing out to sea on a big ship. Evenings, she visited the area homes where genuine hospitality reigned supreme. Mrs. Davis received \$11.00 as a weekly salary during her first term, but offered to teach for \$10.00 a week during the second term, since she had only two pupils and her board and room costs were just \$2.00 each week. Times have changed, methinks!

In 1908, the school term was thirty-two weeks and the average weekly pay was \$10.00, recalls Mrs. Edith Pfaff Clark of Oakland. She had two scholars at St. Helena, Donald and Sewell Orsburn, both of whom were too ill to attend for several weeks when the term began. Nevertheless, the teacher had to stay at the schoolhouse during the appointed hours in order to receive her salary.

Mrs. Sylvia Florian Everett, of Castile, the 1916-17 teacher, remembers high water and floods during her stay in the valley.

Mrs. Amie Robson Durfee, of Silver Springs, was very lonesome and homesick in 1917-18, when she taught at St. Helena, but learned to appreciate the beauty and wonder of nature and bird life while there.

Slowly, but surely, the little village's school life was drawing to a close because there were only a few children left in the valley and it became very costly for the remaining taxpayers to maintain the school. About 1920, they voted to abolish "District

Number Ten" and contracted with the nearest district, at the Five Corners, to allow the St. Helena children to attend sessions there.

Shortly afterward, the big white school building was sold to Harry Alcox and Alexander Armour, who razed it and drew the lumber to Castile. The timeworn furnishings of the schoolhouse were "scattered to the seven winds" with the exception of the teacher's desk, which was purchased by the late Harold Harrison, District Superintendent of Schools. As a memorial to him, Mrs. Harrison and her sons have given the desk to the Castile Historical Museum. This gift is a welcome and cherished addition to the museum's "St. Helena Corner." There is much speculation as to its age and the tales it could tell. Suffice it to say, the desk is a most important link between the past and the present in the fascinating story of the School by the Genesee.

"SINGING SCHOOL"

St. Helena was the community center for a second type of school which afforded benefit and pleasure to its pupils and the entire countryside.

That was the singing school taught by E. Palmer Phelps of Castile. The large class of young people met on the long winter evenings in the schoolhouse, once or twice each week. Seated around the huge round-oak stove and aided by light from candles and kerosene lamps, the pupils learned the true fundamentals of good singing. After extensive practice, evening concerts were given in the Castile, Brooks Grove, and Ridge churches, as well as at St. Helena.

For the church concerts, Mr. Phelps' singing schools at all the places were combined and real social affairs were enjoyed. Special features were added for the "Grand Concerts," such as Miss Lottie Snow, contralto soloist from Buffalo's Trinity Methodist Church; the great violinist, Professor Arthur L. Chase; and a twelve-year-old child prodigy, Master Johnny George, from the Ridge, near Mt. Morris. The April 11, 1879, *Castilian* states that "his execution upon the violin is marvelous." That same winter a *Castilian* article stated that "the social held at Mr. Phelps' home on the Upper Reservation Road was a grand success with

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one hundred twenty-five young people present. Three sleigh-loads of singing-class members came from 'over the river' to attend the party."

Mrs. Laura Kellogg Willey, who celebrated her eighty-eighth birthday recently at her home near the Ridge, recalls many happy occasions when she was a member of the singing school. In later years, the "child prodigy," Johnny George, married Mrs. Willey's sister, Grace Kellogg.

ST. HELENA'S CHURCH LIFE

Weekdays, the St. Helena schoolhouse was used for teaching three R's—Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic. On the Sabbath day, it became a church house, where a fourth R, Religion, was taught.

St. Helena was a charge of the Methodist Protestant Church at Brooks Grove, a hamlet four miles up the eastern hill. The Grove was named for General Micah Brooks, of Gardeau Reservation fame, who settled there in 1832.

The Methodist Protestant Church movement started in 1830 and a society by that name was organized at Brooks Grove in 1840. The church was built there in 1844-45 and Rev. Short was the first preacher. The Brooks Grove Church is served at the present time, 1954, by Rev. Harold Wigden, who with his family occupies the parsonage beside the church.

A powerful revival took place in 1837 at Oak Hill and River Road Forks, east of St. Helena. Sixty persons were baptized one Sunday in the river, south of the then new (1835) highway bridge, by Rev. Robbins, a Methodist Episcopal minister.

In the summer of 1856, before the new schoolhouse was completed, the church people, in and around St. Helena, wished to hold quarterly meeting services. The old school building was not large enough for the occasion and Milton (Squire) Burnap offered the use of his barn, near Main Street. At least once in the history of the valley, religious services were held in a barn. The meeting was very successful and largely attended.

Many baptismal services were conducted in the early days by St. Helena religious believers. In 1860, twenty-eight candidates of the Methodist Protestant faith chose immersion and were

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baptized in the stream while the congregation stood on the shore and sang, "Shall We Gather at the River?"

The clear-sounding bell pealed forth its invitation to worshippers across the valley each Sabbath afternoon. Sunday school and preaching service were held at that time of day, because the minister was busy with the Brooks Grove services in the forenoon.

Among those who served were Reverends Short, Campbell, Willey, Marshall, Bott, Leach, Rowe, Hughes, Woodard, Brownell, Pattridge, Poste, Taylor, Tryon, and Weaver. Reverends Willey and Pattridge served the charge twice. Mrs. Bott is remembered as a "temperamental coloratura soprano."

Usually, the minister was called "Elder," and even yet, when one's name is recalled, he is given that title.

For the church services, the teacher's desk was the preacher's pulpit and the benches and seats were the pews.

When Edward E. Johnson lived at St. Helena, he was the church song leader. He used a tuning fork to get the proper key and then started singing the hymn with his sweet tenor voice. There were many talented singers in the valley and all of them worshipped their Creator through beautiful hymns.

Weekly prayer meetings were held, either at the schoolhouse or at near-by homes. Nathaniel K. Barton, a highly respected "Christian by profession and blacksmith by trade," was leader of the midweek service, which he began, invariably, by singing his favorite hymn, "A Charge to Keep I Have."

The ladies of the St. Helena Church did a great amount of home missionary work, making clothing for the needy and caring for the sick of the community. When death visited the valley homes, the kindly neighbors attended last rites for the deceased at the schoolhouse. The Methodist Protestant minister officiated and the Piper family loaned their little melodeon, which was carried across the way and used to accompany the funeral singers.

Burials were made in several near-by cemeteries. One at the top of the eastern hill was opened about 1830 and was the first in that entire section. Fifty persons were buried there. In 1839 the Oak Hill Cemetery, near Brooks Grove, was established. Some years later, when the plot had to be enlarged, Milton Bur-

nap, Sr., Fred Marsh, Sr., and James Piper, early settlers at St. Helena, helped with the task and chose their family burial spots.

The two cemeteries at Castile were used, and also, of course, the well-known cemetery on the western hillside. Because there were no burial spots in the valley, the riders in the funeral processions, consisting of horse-drawn vehicles, had many nerve-racking experiences in the wintertime, as they wended their way up the steep icy hills on their mournful journeys. There were many deaths each winter.

The little village's ministers were paid a small salary and by donations. The February 14, 1879, *Castilian* states that a very successful "donation" was held at the St. Helena schoolhouse. The goodly sum of seventy-five dollars was raised for Rev. Campbell. Well done for so small a community!

The donation was an annual event, held in the schoolhouse on an autumn evening when the harvest was in. The gifts were all kinds of fruits, vegetables, meat, baked goods, and money. The affair was such a social success that the guests generally ate many of the donations! The older people visited during the evening and the young folks played the good old-fashioned "kissing games." There were no thoughts of germs and unsanitary habits in those days!

Later during the winter a box social was held. That was great fun for everyone and provided further remuneration for the minister and his family. The March 13, 1884, *Castilian* states that "there is to be a box social at the St. Helena schoolhouse this evening, to which everyone is cordially invited. They are noted for their hospitality down in the valley and you will not regret attending the party. . . ."

People from all of the surrounding towns and countryside went to St. Helena's church and school affairs and the meeting house there became a real community center.

The young people of the valley attended church services at Brooks Grove on Sunday evenings. Many friendships, which started that way, flowered into romance and culminated in a happy wedding at which the Methodist Protestant minister "tied the knot."

Evidently, Castile's young people were not opposed to similar friendships. We read in an 1892 issue of the *Castilian*: "The at-

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tractions at Brooks Grove must be very strong for two of our local young men, to induce them to pay a visit to that thriving town on foot, through St. Helena, on their Sunday ramble. But then, a walk of twenty-five miles is nothing in such instances."

Sometimes, ministers from Castile's Methodist Episcopal and Baptist churches held services in the schoolhouse. One such was Rev. Heath of the Baptist faith.

The "Latter Day Saints" or Mormon believers were quite active in the river area in 1894. The August 18th edition of the *Castilian* states that "At St. Helena Sunday night, while the 'Latter Day Saints' were holding a religious service, a group of young people rang cowbells and otherwise disturbed the worshippers. . . ."

Mr. and Mrs. Macajah Nichols were converted to the Mormon belief and moved later to Utah with their large family.

A fiery and eloquent lay-minister named Harold Boyd, who lived near Smokey Hollow, held religious services at various times in the schoolhouse from 1915 to 1918. One of the duties of Miss Amie Robson, the schoolteacher in 1917-18, was to lead the singing at Mr. Boyd's midweek prayer meetings. There were only a few families living in the valley by that date, but all attended the prayer service and stayed later for a visit, while seated beside the big round-oak stove.

After the turn of the century, Brooks Grove ministers did not come regularly to hold religious meetings at St. Helena. The exodus of the people was fast nearing completion and just a handful remained. Sometimes, on summer Sunday afternoons, retired ministers returned to preach the Word of God and to reminisce about the happy days when all of the valley families gathered in the pretty white schoolhouse with the neat green b'inds.

VALLEY OBSTACLES

About 1885 another obstacle presented itself to the people of St. Helena. The state began talking about a storage dam in the Genesee River to furnish a reserve supply of water for the Erie Canal west of Rochester. To the valley farmers this seemed a major catastrophe and many were greatly opposed to it. However, a site for the dam was controversial. If built about a mile

and a quarter above the mill dam at Mt. Morris, the natural river bank would form the walls of the reservoir, but the farm lands would be flooded and St. Helena would be inundated. If built above the Upper Falls near Portage, the villages of Portageville, Rossburg, Wiscoy, Fillmore, Houghton, Caneadea, and Oramel would all be blotted out.

In 1890 the *Castilian* stated that "State Engineer Bogart submitted his report in regard to the building of a water storage dam in the Genesee Gorge above Mt. Morris. He said the plan was entirely feasible and placed the cost at \$1,000,000 for a dam that would be 58 feet high and would hold 1,500,000,000 cubic feet of water. The favored point of construction was a short distance above Mt. Morris. . . ."

In August, 1892, the *Castilian* stated that "The water storage dam project on the Genesee River was investigated recently by a party from Rochester including the mayor. They drove up the river to Portage from Mt. Morris and were favorably impressed by the project. Many persons living below Mt. Morris who were opposed at first, were now much in favor of it. They saw no reason why the dam would not be built.

"A special report was given which declared that the waters of the Genesee were navigable, that the state had a right to draw, whenever it chose, such amount of water as was deemed necessary for public purposes for the Erie Canal. The site above Mt. Morris was recommended, and that a dam be built 58 feet high from the flow line of the river, sufficient in strength at the base to allow it to be extended to 100 feet in height. Great stress was put on the possibility of using this dam for power along the valley. It was not felt that a dam 58 feet high at Mt. Morris would cause any destruction to bridge or land in St. Helena. . . ."

Such reports and legislation to permit building a dam were annual topics of interest. The farmers along the rich valley land were much opposed to a dam. The town of St. Helena could see its doom if a dam of 100 or 130 feet in height was built. Reaching any kind of agreement to make the dam a reality seemed impossible.

In 1894 it was decided to build the dam near Portage instead. This decision caused Hon. William P. Letchworth much concern and for many years he fought to protect his land against it.

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In 1898 a Genesee River Company was formed and authorized to build a dam within five years. The company was given a franchise to secure property but was not able to raise sufficient funds within the specified time and its charter expired in 1903. This brought relief from anxiety for a time, but 1906 saw the river company active, and Mr. Letchworth deeded his property to the state, subject to his life tenancy. For many years, talk of building a dam was annual news but little was done about it.

ST. HELENA HOSPITALITY

St. Helena was host to many a traveller, and its people were kind to the unfortunate. One figure familiar in the town was "Aunt Eban Noddy," somewhat demented but entirely harmless. She made annual pilgrimages over the country on foot, dressed in fanciful attire. She was the mother of "Sol Noddy" who made his home at St. Helena and Castile for more than forty years. He, like his mother, made trips over the countryside and was given shelter by many good people when he needed it. Sol died July 2, 1895, at the Wyoming County Home at Varysburg. His mother, Mrs. Eva Nichols, "Aunt Eban," died February 21, 1879. It is thought one of the unidentified remains from the St. Helena cemetery was that of Mrs. Nichols.

The *Castilian* of February 23, 1884, stated that "Tuesday evening of that week, Mrs. McKay entertained about fifty invited guests at the home of her son-in-law, Samuel Agar, below St. Helena. Mrs. McKay was a splendid hostess and understood the art of making her guests feel at home as well as keeping them entertained. A fine supper was served to which the company did ample justice. Later in the evening they departed, feeling they had spent a most enjoyable time. Mrs. McKay spent most of her time in Rochester, but during the two or three months of winter, she was with her daughter, Mrs. Agar. . . ."

On March 16, 1894, the *Castilian* said, "A very large number of young people of Castile, Mt. Morris, Nunda, and also friends from Buffalo, were very highly entertained at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Piper and family of St. Helena, Thursday. During the evening refreshments were served by the able hostess, Mrs. Piper, who knew so well how to entertain. Music and games

were indulged in until the wee small hours. Came time for parting and with a warm grasp of the hand, goodbyes were spoken with many wishes for the welfare and prosperity of the family."

FLOOD DANGERS

As the years went by, the valley folk had to depend more and more on farming, as the mills were silent, the timber mostly cleared away. Many moved away and the earlier settlers dropped out, one by one. Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel K. Barton moved to Castile, followed by the Johnson family, and then the John W. Piper family. The river had done great damage to the Johnson farm.

The *Castilian* of May 25, 1894, published this item:

"It is getting to be quite common to have a flood during the months of May and June, and this year we had one in earnest, the fall of rain exceeding the heavy floods of June, 1889, which caused the Johnstown disaster. It began raining Thursday of last week and continued without cessation until Monday night. Wolf Creek was a turbulent river, and old Genesee was a sight to behold. The river reached the highest point Monday morning and began to recede. No doubt the heavy rains have caused a great amount of damage to crops but the high water had little effect on Castile and immediate vicinity. St. Helena fared badly. The road below the bridge was all washed away and also, many culverts and small bridges.

"Samuel Agar, who has charge of the Wadsworth farm below St. Helena, had a lively experience with the flood Sunday evening. There were about forty head of cattle on the place, and as long as they had dry ground to stand on, they remained quiet, but when they were crowded into a corner and saw no way of escape, they made a break into the water and endeavored to swim out. They were carried down the stream and became entangled on the wire fences, and most of them would have drowned but for the efforts of Mr. Agar. He swam for two hours extricating them and succeeded in getting all but two. He suffered considerably from cold.

"At Geneseo, the river rose six feet that Sunday night and continued to rise three inches an hour. The waters covered the

country from hill to hill and gave the valley the appearance of a lake. . . ."

Ice jams were equally serious, and on March 8, 1895, the *Castilian* had this to say: "It is said to be a very interesting sight to see the ice along the banks of the river at St. Helena. That part of the Frank Lucas farm that lies next to the river is almost entirely covered with ice, in some places piled high. Some cakes are said to be four feet and nine inches thick. A witness said he had never seen the like of it and he had seen the ice go out many times. Great cakes of ice would be pushed up on end as high as a house, and then fall with a terrific crash.

"Around St. Helena the water ran so high and the ice piled up so much that cakes of ice were left on the bridge. The ice piled up around the house of Macajah Nichols and almost hid it from view. Two maiden ladies, the Misses Weed, living across the river, had sixteen sheep and one or two cows carried away by water. . . ."

April 5, 1895, an item: "The river road from St. Helena down was so blocked with ice that it was impossible to travel with a wagon below John Chaffee's residence (Gardeau). The ice was piled up from one cake to three and four feet deep, and trees as large as telegraph poles were bent over into the road. Monday a committee of the town board looked over the ground and let the job of opening a passage for \$15.00. . . ."

This section of the road was maintained as long as possible. The river kept cutting it back until finally all that remained was scarcely a two-track road partially supported by logs and brush thrown in as reinforcement.

RIVER TRAVELLERS

During the more quiet season of the Genesee River, it was a source of pleasure, not only to local people, but to the Rochester Canoe Club, as well. From the *Castilian* of May 31, 1897, we take this item:

"The Rochester Canoe Club, on its annual cruise down the Genesee River, made up of the following members: H.M. Stewart, Cort Avery, Al T. Brown, Wm. Patterson, Lee Rishwood, Col. C. H. Moody, Frank L. Dodgson, L. P. Newton, H. Cliff

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Shaw, Dr. F. R. Smith, P. P. Dickenson, Frank P. Crouch, H. B. Squire, Jas. K. Hand, Chas. B. Wolters, Ed. F. Pillow, Wm. H. Burtis, Geo. P. Decker, and Wm. Stace left Belfast on Sunday morning and the trip was full of interesting and amusing incidents. Dinner was eaten at Fillmore and the merry canoeists embarked again to arrive at Portageville at 8:30 Sunday night. Several canoes were punctured in the various rapids, mended and started again.

"From Portageville, the boys took the Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad to Lewis's Switch and again embarked below the Lower Falls. A quick run was made to the mouth of Wolf Creek and there all disembarked and went to the Tom Marsh home at St. Helena. The Rochester Canoe Club know there is but one Tom Marsh and if anyone doubts it, read the following menu which was served for Monday's dinner.

Olives	Fruits	Pickles
Roast Chicken with Dressing		
Raised Biscuit		Cold Ham
Potatoes in Cream	Green Corn	Beans
Lettuce Salad		Cottage Cheese
Strawberry Short Cake		
Wine Plant Pie		Corn Starch Cake
Mrs. Thos. E. Marsh's Nut Cake		
Coffee	Iced Milk	Lemonade
Perfectos a la Commodore	Straight Cut Cigarettes	

"The menu was printed on an exceedingly attractive birch-bark folder especially prepared for the occasion, the four pages being tied with the club colors. If anyone ever saw a well-fed and satisfied crowd, it was at the Marsh homestead. Fred Marsh, Tom's father, came down from his home on the eastern hill, and helped entertain the boys.

"Postmaster L. S. Coleman of Castile was a guest of the Marshes. He is an old canoeist and a whole-souled genial gentleman. It was a pleasure for the boys to meet one of the old school. The members reached Mt. Morris Monday night, tired but happy. . . ."

GENESEE TIMBER

February 24, 1895: "John Chaffee, who lived one and a half miles below St. Helena, drew to the yard of the Elitsac Company, a mammoth cottonwood log, sixteen feet long and three feet through at the top and four feet through at the butt, scaling 1,024 feet. The log was cut on the east side of the river near the county line of Wyoming and Livingston, several weeks before. It was put on the bobs and drawn as far as the river, where it tipped over. Six horses were then hitched to the log and it was drawn across the river and up to the road. It was again put on the bobs and began its five-mile journey. When it was within one and a half miles of Castile, it tipped over and lay beside the road for several days. It was finally loaded again and ended its journey at the mill yard where it was converted into lumber."

BITS OF NEWS

The *Castilian*, February —, 1897: "Postmaster L. S. Coleman secured the appointment of Mrs. Lucy A. Wallace as postmistress at St. Helena. It is expected the contract for carrying the mail between Castile and St. Helena will be advertised shortly, as Mrs. Wallace has already received her commission. This new office will be of great convenience to the farmers who reside in the north-eastern part of the township and on the Reservation roads. Mr. Coleman has worked hard to get the office established. . . ."

Mrs. Wallace was the grandmother of Norman and Phyletus Phelps of Castile. The post office in St. Helena had been closed since June, 1867.

In November, 1898, occurred the death of a long-familiar figure about St. Helena. Timothy Holbrook died at the home of a friend at Gardeau. Charles Locke of Castile, then poormaster, was notified and a distant relative was located at Mt. Morris, who made arrangements for burial at Mt. Morris. Mr. Holbrook was known as "The Button Man." He was a man of fine appearance and well-educated, but overwork had claimed its toll. For years he had wandered about the country, preaching to those who would listen. He claimed to be ordained of God to preach

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the second coming of Christ and called himself Timothy Washington Moses Holbrook. He wore a long black coat of clerical cut, nearly covered with white pearl buttons. One cluster surrounding a large one represented Christ and the twelve disciples. Other emblems had also been sewn to the coat. Whenever a noted man died, Timothy would sew on another button in his memory. A strange man who lived in a world of his own.

ST. HELENA NEIGHBORS

In 1866, Mrs. Rucksbe Brainerd and her son Lyman bought the garden and fruit farm at the top of St. Helena west hill. For more than thirty years, Mr. Brainerd's peach orchards and melon fields were known for miles around. Each year he shipped produce into the Pennsylvania coal fields, as well as dealing extensively with the local farmers. He married Miss Olivia Van Kleeck. An only daughter, Gertrude, died at the age of twenty-three. Mr. Brainerd died in 1912, shortly after receiving a broken leg as a result of being thrown from his wagon near Castile station.

Others residing near by were Daniel Bills on Lot 69, Mrs. C. Brownell on Lot 67, and Franklin Eddy, George Emmett, and William H. Thayer on Lot 68. Mr. Thayer was a carpenter and joiner.

NEARING DESERTION

Nearing the turn of the century there were only a few families owning property in St. Helena. They were John Piper, John Streeter, George E. Piper, Lucy Wallace, Thomas E. Marsh, A. Alcott, Herman Piper, John Orsburn, and Fred Marsh. Laura Piper was there until 1902. The southern end of Water Street was no more. The school was still kept at this time. The river had moved closer and closer to the west side of the valley.

The George Teeple family left St. Helena and moved to Nunda in the early 1920's, when the river destroyed their farm. Soon afterward, the buildings were washed away. For several years, whenever floods came, the family had moved their furniture to the barn and waited for the worst to happen. Finally, they could endure no more and the river became ruler.

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A story is told of a Warsaw man, Fred Lester, now deceased, who lived as a child at St. Helena with his family. His father was serving with the Marines, and his mother was alone with her small children at the time of the spring freshets. The raging waters were lapping at the floor of the cabin and threatened to tear it loose. The quick-thinking mother fastened a log chain to the cabin and then to a sturdy tree and thus cheated the Genesee of its victim.

We have been unable to find more information on this family.

There were no new settlers in the valley now, and as, one by one, they dropped out, no new families took their places.

In the early 1930's, the land was taken over by various utilities again planning a power dam at Mt. Morris. The dam still seemed far in the future, so the land was rented by those who wished to stay on. Mrs. Nellie Streeter and her son, George, stayed there until 1948 when they moved to the Wheeler house on the Five Corners Road. Her husband, John, who was born in St. Helena in 1870, died there in 1945. The Streeter house was torn down and drawn away in the spring of 1951 by Herman Chasey and Paul Schroeder of Castile, who purchased it shortly after the family left the valley.

ST. HELENA WATER GAUGE

Mr. C. Scott De Golyer has been very helpful in giving us the following information about the recording gauge installed at St. Helena to check the water stage of the river. This station was established by George M. Brett and Charles E. Allen on August 14, 1908. It consisted of a standard Geological Survey chain gauge attached to the lower chord of the first left-hand panel of the middle span of the highway bridge. It was converted to a recording gauge station by W. G. Hoyt and C. S. De Golyer on August 24, 1911. The first recording gauge was a Gurley printer indicating the river stage every fifteen minutes. The St. Helena gauge house was believed to be one of the first in the United States that was built of concrete.

The St. Helena gauging station was discontinued on September 30, 1950, because it was in the area affected by waters impounded by the Mt. Morris dam. It was replaced by the station

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at Portageville, which had been established in December, 1945. The average daily flow of the Genesee River at St. Helena for the forty-two years of record was 1,223 cubic feet per second. The maximum flow during the same period was 44,400 cubic feet per second, on May 17, 1916; the minimum was 18 cubic feet per second on October 5 and 17, 1913. The drainage above St. Helena was 1,017 square miles.

The ground water observation at Castile was established by John Ferris on November 18, 1942. It is officially designated as WO-1 (meaning first observation well in Wyoming County). It is located on the former Lyman Brainerd farm near St. Helena. It was a "hand measured" well until October 17, 1951, when the standard tape gauge was installed. For the ten years of record, the average water level has been about 5.6 feet below the measuring point or land surface elevation. The highest level of water in the well was in February 1945, when it was only 0.58 feet below the land surface. Its lowest observed level was 12.92 feet below the measuring point on November 23, 1952.

The purpose of the ground water observation is to aid in a study of the water level throughout the United States. Readings are taken weekly by Mr. De Golyer who reports them to the U. S. Department of the Interior.

Herman Piper read the chain gauge on the St. Helena Bridge from the time of installation in 1908 until 1919, when Glen Streeter took the readings for a time; after this, Mr. De Golyer took over until the stations were discontinued in 1950. Both kinds of readings were taken to check on accuracy.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The highway bridge was dismantled during the summer of 1950. Livingston County owned one half of the structure, as the center of the river was the boundary line between the two counties. The entire bridge was given to Livingston County as compensation for its demolition by the county's highway department.

The population of St. Helena dwindled fast after the school was closed in the early 1920's. The once busy valley had succumbed to the urge of progress and the young folks sought new

fields. The river remained a good place for a cool swim on a hot summer day and provided many an occasion for a picnic journey. Many of the young folks of the near-by countryside have pleasant memories of hours spent along the river—and perhaps of Arthur Hopkins' melon fields when the family lived across the river on the Orsburn farm.

The long-expected dam was started above Mt. Morris in 1948 and finished in 1951, except for grading and removing buildings and equipment. The last bucket of concrete was poured October 31, 1951, just forty-three months after the project was begun. At the peak of the project, it had employed 550 men.

An article in the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* on April 12, 1954, stated that "Miles Freeman, head civilian engineer with the U.S. Army, in charge of operations at the dam, spoke before a county service organization recently and gave some interesting facts:

"With all tributaries of the Genesee River running full banks, and all hollows on the farm land filled with surface water, a five and one-half inch rainfall in twenty-four hours within the watershed of the Mt. Morris dam would bring the water up to the top of the spillway. This would bring it to the same elevation as the foot of the Lower Falls in Letchworth Park. The volume of water would be equivalent to a square city block sixty-three miles high.

"Such a rainfall is not expected but the dam is built to care for such an event.

"Another interesting fact that he stated, was that the dam was built by the Army as a strictly flood control project, yet two nineteen-foot penstocks have been included, for 'if and when.' He also stated that the present construction does not provide sufficient water to justify hydroelectric operation, unless three more dams were built near Portageville for flood control.

"Remarking that lime generates heat, he said that the mass of concrete in the dam, in which 1,600,000 tons of rock from LeRoy, and 3,500 carloads of cement, were used, still registers 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Large quantities of ice water were used when the concrete was being poured to keep the mixture cool and, therefore, stronger. Three days after pouring, the concrete mass showed a



A general view of the section of Grace Cemetery, Castile, to which bodies were removed in 1952 when it was necessary to abandon the cemetery at St. Helena. In the background is the area where unidentified bodies lie.



Detail of the large monument made by a well-known stone cutter of St. Helena, Richard Emmett, when his young wife, Sally, died.

(Both photos, by courtesy of The Castilian, Castile, N.Y.)

temperature of 115 degrees. Engineers have figured the mass will continue to get stronger for 100 years.

"The dam cost 20 million dollars, which will be liquidated in forty years, with savings from the annual flood damage of \$500,000 a year. It is built in fifty-foot sections of monoliths, and once a month eight readings are taken with a ten point plumb bob, to one ten-thousandths of a millimeter. Regular checks are made with a micrometer for contraction and expansion, and as of now, Mr. Freeman stated there is evidence of a change of but 1/16 of an inch in the 1,050 foot structure. . . ."

ST. HELENA CEMETERY

The completion of the dam meant the time was at hand when the little cemetery of St. Helena would have to be moved. The State Department of Public Works ordered the exhumation of the bodies and the contract was given to Mr. Anthony Spallino, contractor from Niagara Falls, N.Y. Only eight monuments marked the graves in the cemetery, now overgrown with brush and some trees since the time of the last burial there. From the markers, the last burial was thought to have been made in 1871, but relatives and friends of the Orsburn family say the two little Orsburn boys were buried there in 1894.

Among the remains found at St. Helena were those of what appeared to be an Indian. There was some speculation as to whether the body could be that of Jesse Jemison, son of Mary Jemison, "The White Woman of the Genesee." According to Mary Jemison's life story, told by her to James E. Seaver for publication before she left the Gardeau Reservation, her son Jesse was killed in a drunken brawl by his brother John, while engaged in logging operations for Robert Whaley, near Tea Table Rock, at Wolf Creek. Burial was made after the manner of the white people. The fact that this occurred about 1812, while the land at St. Helena was not sold until 1823, would cause some doubt as to the possibility of the remains being those of Jesse Jemison.

A total of ninety-two bodies was found, a large portion of them being infants and children. Many of these died from measles and whooping cough which were both dreaded diseases in those early days. The remains were placed in small wooden

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boxes, made at the Clyde W. Barber Lumber Mill in Castile. The dimensions of the boxes were 1' x 2' x 2½'. They were made from pine and hemlock lumber. All the boxes were marked where identification could be made. Some markers were located under the earth. Inscriptions furnish the following data:

Gifford—Asa W., died Dec. 17, 1884, 86y 4m.

Emmett—Sally, wife of Richard Emmett, daughter of Josiah and Mary Stocking, died Aug. 1, 1851, 18y.

Morse—William, died May 12, 1851, 57y, 3m 22d.

Elmira, daughter William and E., died July 22, 1841, 6y.

Melvin, son William and E., died July 8, 1841, 1m 20d.

Preston—George E., died Oct. 4, 1848, 4m.

Smith—Lydia E., daughter George M. and Lucy, died March 22, 1875, 1y 6m 5d.

Stocking—Helen, daughter Josiah and Mary, died Jan. 29, 1845, 6y.

Dennis, son Josiah and Mary, died Jan. 30, 1845, 3y.

Westbrook—John, son S. M. and Mary, died April 10, 1846, 10y 1m.

John Westbrook was the grandson of Nehemiah Westbrook, first white owner of Polly Jemison's farm on Gardeau Flats.

The re-interment of these pioneer people took place at Castile in Grace Cemetery, where a special section in the southeast corner was allocated for that purpose. All the markers were placed at the proper graves and each unidentified grave was marked as that of a child or an adult.

St. Helena is now a name only. The pioneers of the valley have moved to the shade of the maples in Castile. Not many miles from the scene of their struggles with the early wilderness and the sometimes raging Genesee, the pioneers sleep on. Will the Genesee which they loved, and sometimes feared, close at last over the tiny town site or will it be allowed to grow again to a resemblance of its former state of wilderness? Never more will the hum of mill wheels fill the valley, for St. Helena is now the "Ghost Town of the Genesee."

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